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PRODUCT 45

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JOHN WILLSTEED

Photocopiers got a workout - in libraries and offices, and access to screen printing facilities at universities broadened the creative options.

"Black and white were very much the colours of the time. Probably [because] photocopiers were so accessible, and black and white was a fine art approach, very much a DIY approach," Willsteed remembers.

"But around that time, certainly the people in my scene in Brisbane, getting access to the activities at Queensland Uni meant we were able to start doing photo screen prints and incorporate photography into the making of a screen, and exposing that stuff, so we could get multiple-colour stuff done reasonably easily. [We could] print on virtually anything, fabric, as well as on card and paper. It still required a lot of work to do the artwork, but not the same sort of work that was necessary when hand-cutting stencils. Some of those early singles, they are very obviously hand cut stencils ... some of them look kind of dodgy."

With colour photocopiers not readily available before the 1980s, many bands resorted to hand-colouring black and white photocopies- giving each piece a collectible, one-off appeal.

"We'd take black and white A4 or AS photocopy handbills, and we'd hand colour them, and a lot of other bands you'd see would be a black and white photocopy or an insert that was hand coloured with crayons or coloured pencils, so there was a lot of that sort of manual manipulation," Willsteed says. "In a sense, you're getting a piece of something, like a piece of art. it's individual, it's not as though people were numbering things, but it was certainly hand made, there's no question about that."

This DIY approach to a band's image and artwork became another creative outlet for them, an extension - and reflection - of the music.

"The fact that it's the same people doing the art as doing the music, it really means that the whole thing is integrated. I can't imagine anybody doing artwork for something where they weren't doing it themselves, it was their music and their art," Willsteed says. "The artwork has to reflect what's contained in the music, whether it's literal or not, it could often be quite subliminal, but it's still certainly there."

For Willsteed, the packaging was a tactile extension of the music it contained. And the fact it was a tangible physical product gave it even more worth.

"The thing in your hand was [something] you owned. I certainly feel like that, I'm a big believer in the power of the artefact in that regard, I put credit value on the things I physically own rather than the things I digitally own."

But although vinyl is enjoying a gradual resurgence, Willsteed doesn't see it ever growing beyond a niche cottage industry.

Willsteed's own cover art efforts extended to sleeves for two Xero (Xiro) cassettes: 'Religious Wars' and 'Half the Profits', and a couple of vinyl releases.

"We shared that, Iréna did the artwork for one and I did the other. I did the artwork for the 'Lust in the Dust' 12-inch that we released on M Squared, and then the next record cover I did would've been 16 months later, so record covers and CD covers were not really my thing," he says.

Among his favourite cover art of the time from other bands, Willsteed lists The Apartments - The Return of the Hypnotist (Able 1979), Makers of the Dead Travel Fast - Tael of a Saeghars (M Squared 1980) and The Swell Guy s- Songs (Flat Records 1980).

"I just think [Tae/ of a Saeghars is] a really beautiful cover, with artwork by Tim Schultz, it's just really lovely, and one of my fondest ones from that time.

"I also loved The Return of the Hypnotist. A good cover, photo by Jane Chisholm, layout by Peter Mitton Walsh.

"The Swell Guys cover, it's very much of its time. [They] were people I really liked, they were mates, and Gary Warner who did the cover, me and him were living in a house together at the time, so there 's a lot of personal connection with it. I really love the inside sleeve, it's got this little bit of a script, it's dialogue between a couple of these characters and some photographs. It's a really nice use of the available technology - black and white on the inside and spot colour on the outside, it's a really attractive thing."